

# MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 8 January 2013 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Vincent Davis (Vice-Chair), Paul Bell, Amanda De Ryk, Vicky Foxcroft, Ami Ibitson, Darren Johnson, Sam Owolabi-Oluyole and Alan Hall.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Patsy Foreman and Liam Curran

ALSO PRESENT: Joseph Dunton (Scrutiny Manager), Molly Gavriel (National Management Trainee), Mark Humphreys (Group Finance Manager - Customer Services), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Councillor Susan Wise (Cabinet Member for Customer Services), Madeleine Jeffery (SGM: Housing Strategy and Policy), Jeff Endean (Programme Manager – Housing Matters), Salena Mulhere (Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Adam Barrett (Lewisham Homes), Steve Bonvini (Regenter B3), Alwyn Lewis (Regenter B3), Nimisha Patel (Pinnacle, Head of PFI), Tracey Jones (RB3, Operations Manager ) and Scott Cook (Partnerships and Service Improvement Manager)

## 1. Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2012

- 1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2012 be signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

## 2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 Councillor Bell declared a non-prejudicial interest as a Lewisham Homes Board Director.
- 2.2 Councillor Hall declared a non-prejudicial interest as a board member of Phoenix Community Housing

## 3. Brockley PFI - mid year review

- 3.1 Madeleine Jeffery, Steve Bonvini and Alwyn Lewis introduced the report. Three key points to note were the below target performance of three Key Performance Indicators (KPI), only 28 homes are left to be brought up to the Decent Homes standard and the continuing implementation of the Regenter B3 2012/13 Improvement Plan. It was advised that the committee will be informed on the costs and impact of the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT) decision once the outcome was known.
- 3.2 In response to questions from members the committee were advised:
  - There is no contract within the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for the management of the roads in the area covered by the PFI.
  - Staff from Regenter B3 assured the committee that they had taken on board the concerns raised by the committee at its previous meeting around conducting consultations. In response they have appointed a member of staff to lead on consultations
  - The external decoration programme covers all flats and properties in the PFI area but security doors do not come under this programme.
  - Regenter B3 are working with a number of agencies including Lewisham Credit Union and Lewisham Council to support tenants in preparation for welfare reform.

- A Notice to Quit (NTQ) is issued after four weeks if no contact can be made with a tenant in rent arrears. This is the first step in engaging the tenant in discussion and does not automatically lead to eviction. Early intervention in rent arrears cases is important to identify underlying issues and preventing further arrears from occurring.

- Representatives of all tenures are represented on residents panels and forums facilitated by Regenter B3

- Regenter B3 liaise directly with Lewisham Council on any issues around inappropriate waste and its removal.

- 3.3 **Resolved:** That the report be noted; that information on the management of roads within the Brockley PFI; and clarification regarding Regenter B3 and Lewisham Homes procedures on taking enforcement action, including NTQs, against residents who are in rent arrears be provided to the committee.

#### 4. Lewisham Homes – mid year review

- 4.1 Madeleine Jeffery and Adam Barrett introduced the report. The key points to note were that they are on track to deliver the full year Decent Homes programme on time and on budget and an overall resident satisfaction level reported at 94.6%.

- 4.2 In response to questions from members the committee were advised:

- Residents affected by the benefit cap have been identified. They are now being contacted and a range of support options are in place. These include early intervention and working with the Credit Union.

- Procedures for dealing with tenants in rent arrears will be applied only after cases have been examined on an individual basis.

- The purpose of the cash incentive to move to a smaller home is not to assist the payment of arrears but this may be considered on a case by case basis.

- Lewisham Homes have introduced a new customer care programme. They are also introducing a competency framework for staff to improve communications issues with residents in recognition of the challenges in dealing with residents regarding anti-social behaviour issues.

- 4.3 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### 5. Proposed rent and service charge increases

- 5.1 Mark Humphries introduced the report. The key points to note were that the average rent rise of 4.05% or £3.54 per week, an average service charge increase of 2.58% or £0.19 per week, and an increase in garage charges of 2.6% or £0.30 per week all of which are in line with the governments convergence formula.

- 5.2 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### 6. Housing Matters: results of the consultation and way forward

- 6.1 Jeff Endean introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- There was a low understanding amongst residents of the four available options in the consultation

- A majority of those residents who responded preferred retention of the current ALMO.
- There was little appetite amongst residents for transferring ownership to an existing Housing Association
- There were high levels of concern around changes in tenure and rent security under both transfer options
- The report recommends that the options of reinstating Council management of the housing stock and transferring homes to an existing housing association are no longer pursued.
- Furthermore it is recommended that the option of changing the nature of Lewisham Homes with a view to transfer to a new resident led organisation is further pursued as through this option they might attract further investment, increase resident control and deliver resident aspirations.

6.2 In response to questions from members the committee were advised:

- It would be appropriate to involve Lewisham Homes staff in any further consultation activity if the conversation was about changing the nature of the organisation rather than a choice between organisations
- A range of commitments could be built into the transfer agreement including the building of new homes and representation of the Council on the board of a new organisation. These details would need to be explored legally and any updates would be brought back to the Housing Select Committee.
- Moving forward would involve continuing consultation with residents to shape any new organisation that may be formed.
- There is a high level of satisfaction with Lewisham Homes amongst residents but there is also an appreciation of the Council's priorities and the need for further investment in the housing stock.
- The ongoing costs of any consultation exercise will be supplied to the committee
- Exploring the option to evolve Lewisham Homes does not rule out the option of retaining the Almo in its current form.
- The proposal to build 600 homes should be regarded as an estimate at this stage as a lot of work would be needed before any building work could commence. The priority is to increase investment given the broader financial context.
- It was stressed that the report is not suggesting a ballot at this stage but more time to work with residents to develop ideas for a potential new entity and what it might look like in the future.
- The Council is currently able to discharge its duty to those assessed as homeless in the borough after previous stock transfers.
- There has been consideration of allowing other Housing Associations to build on Council owned land however it was acknowledged that many of the infill sites are small and may not be attractive to other providers

6.3 The committee then discussed the report and the following key points were raised:

- Any further action would require a consultation that was clearer on the options available.
- Electing tenant representatives to the Lewisham Homes Board, notwithstanding the results of any further consultation, would serve as a first step in setting up a resident lead body.
- Concerns were raised over future rents, security of tenure and the ability to deliver on investment given that the Council would be giving up control of the housing stock under the transfer option.
- There is a need to keep the cost of any future consultation as low as possible.

6.4 The committee noted the evidence provided in part 2 of the report.

6.5 **RESOLVED:** That the committees views on Housing Matters: results of the consultation and way forward be submitted to Mayor and Cabinet on 16 January 2013:

- The committee would like to urge Mayor and Cabinet, at their meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> January, to send out a clear message to residents that both of the options outlined in paragraph 7.1 of the report are being considered equally in any continuing conversations with residents.

- The committee urges the democratisation of tenant representation on the Lewisham Homes board as a matter of urgency, by electing rather than selecting tenant Board members, notwithstanding the timescale and result of the Housing Matters consultation.

## 7. Select Committee work programme

7.1 The committee requested that the item on “Use of temporary accommodation for homeless households” be moved from the meeting on 6 March 2013 to the meeting on 4 February 2012.

7.2 **RESOLVED:** That the work programme be noted and any necessary changes are delegated to the Chair.

## 8. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

8.1 The Committee agreed to refer their views in relation to item 4, Housing Matters; results of the consultation and way forward, to the Mayor and Cabinet Meeting on 16 January.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.

Chair:

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Date:

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